



Representative Jim Buck

24TH DISTRICT

1997 Session Report



Spring 1997

Dear friends,

I am pleased to send you this report on the accomplishments of what was a productive and historic legislative session. During 105 days of long hours and hard work, the Legislature passed the Timber Retraining Act and approved history-making revisions in the state's welfare and juvenile justice systems. We reached agreement on a two-year operating budget that is \$112 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit and slows the growth of government by the widest margin since 1971. It was also the first time since 1957 that lawmakers concluded their work in a budget-writing year without a special session. The Legislature's record of achievement also includes the adoption of \$411 million in tax reductions.

As chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, I worked hard to protect the interests of our timber counties and to bring more accountability to the Department of Natural Resources. I prime-sponsored 26 bills, 10 of which passed the Legislature and were sent to the governor. Several other measures that I introduced were incorporated into other House and Senate bills.

I want to express my gratitude to everyone who contacted me by phone or by mail during the session. Your comments and opinions helped guide my decisions as your legislator. And special appreciation to the many residents of our district who came to the capital at their own expense to testify at public hearings on the timber retraining bill and other issues.

Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving you in Olympia.

Sincerely,

Jim Buck
State Representative

Locke signs Buck timber retraining bill

In the closing hours of the session April 27, the House passed the Timber Retraining Act (2SHB 1201) and sent it to Gov. Gary Locke. The measure, which the governor signed May 15, will provide continued financial assistance and education benefits for unemployed timber workers and salmon fishermen.

There was no bill that I sponsored this year that had a greater priority for me, and none that required as much hands-on effort to keep it moving through the process. There were some agonizing moments in the debate that preceded final passage, but the 66-31 House vote was the gratifying culmination of months of hard work and negotiations to keep the program on track.

When the measure originally passed the House in March, second-level workers were not included, but I was determined to do whatever was necessary to make sure those people in our coastal counties weren't left out. When the bill reached the Senate, I was able to negotiate an amendment to include benefits for workers indirectly affected by downturns in logging and fishing. The amendment covers secondary workers in eight counties including Jefferson, Clallam and Grays Harbor.

Under the bill, dislocated workers will be eligible for up to two years of unemployment insurance benefits, provided they are in training. An additional 13 weeks of benefits will be provided for individuals participating in college courses or training expected to last one year or longer.



Elements of the measure also provide tuition waivers, mortgage and rental assistance, and help with food, shelter and health-care services for displaced workers and their families. The bill also includes provisions to assist struggling businesses in the affected areas.

Our resource-based communities have suffered tremendous economic hardships. This bill is a virtual lifeline in efforts to keep families together and rebuild lives and careers.

Landmark juvenile justice reform

The Legislature succeeded in enacting a juvenile justice reform measure — comprising the most significant changes in 20 years — ensuring that older juvenile offenders will face strict punishment for their crimes, starting with the first offense.

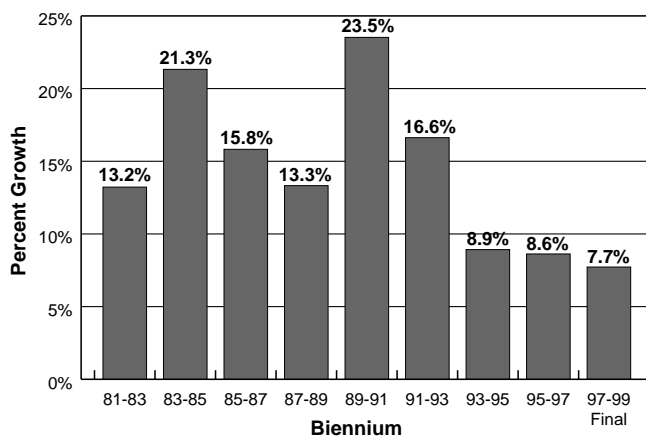
Our reform plan provides that 16- and 17-year-olds who commit drive-by shooting, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, and any crime in which the offender was armed with a firearm will be prosecuted and sentenced as adults.

The measure also provides greater flexibility for prosecutors and judges to deal with juvenile offenders so that every youngster who breaks the law receives an appropriate sentence, whether it is punishment or rehabilitation.



Rep. Buck confers with Majority Leader Barb Lisk during floor session.

General Fund - State Expenditures
Biennial Percent Change



1997-99 budget protects taxpayers, prioritizes education

With total spending of \$19.07 billion, the operating budget adopted by the Legislature represents an in-

crease over the previous biennium of 7.7 percent — the smallest level of growth in 25 years. The two-year budget is \$112 million below the limit set by Initiative 601 and leaves the state with a responsible reserve fund of \$366 million.

The budget fulfills the commitment made by Republicans at the beginning of the session to forge a responsible budget that makes education the top priority. It provides \$8.9 billion for our public schools — an increase of more than 7 percent.

We also increased funding for higher education, with about \$2.2 billion earmarked for our state's colleges and universities — an 11.54 percent increase over the previous biennium. The budget boosts enrollments by nearly 6,400, continues support for workforce training programs at the two-year colleges to serve up to 7,200 people, and sets aside \$34 million in financial aid to help students from low- and middle-income families.

1997 Legislative Session Report



Standing up for taxpayers

An important goal this year was to control government spending and provide real tax relief to the people and families of Washington. Our work produced savings to taxpayers of \$411 million.

We passed a one-year extension of the 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy that was enacted in 1995. We also passed a long-term property-tax relief and reform package that would save the owner of a \$110,000 home as much as \$23,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage. Our plan would also protect homeowners from dramatic increases in their assessments. Unfortunately, the governor vetoed the proposal. In response, the Legislature voted to send the package to the voters in November as a referendum.

We also completed repeal of the massive business and occupation tax increase that was imposed in 1993. The governor vetoed the bill that would have repealed the tax immediately, but later signed a similar measure that will complete the rollback next year. The delay was unnecessary, but the final outcome was a plus.

Transportation budget

The Legislature approved a \$3.3 billion transportation budget that did not include an increase in the state's gas tax. It does, however, call for a \$1.5 million performance audit of the Department of Transportation, the State Patrol and the Department of Licensing. A performance audit will review spending and determine where efficiencies can be made.

As a member of the House Transportation Policy and Budget Committee, I share the concern over the efficient use of our tax dollars, and worked with the committee to identify nearly \$200 million in efficiencies and cost savings in this budget.

Locke vetoes storm-damage exemptions

I was deeply disappointed that Gov. Locke vetoed SSB 5157, which would have provided sales and use tax exemptions to businesses and homeowners who suffered property damage in this winter's storms and flooding.

The original proposal extended the waiver only to private homeowners, but

the measure was amended to include elements of a bill (HB 2101) I had sponsored to provide a waiver to business owners whose facilities sustained weather damage. The result was a comprehensive package to help people in our district with repair and replacement of storm-damaged homes, commercial buildings, and motor vehicles not covered by insurance. The governor's decision to turn his back on people recovering from storm losses was particularly disturbing because the bill had strong bipartisan support, passing both the House and Senate unanimously.

Governor rejects DNR oversight bill

On May 19, Gov. Locke vetoed a bill I sponsored that would establish legislative oversight of decisions by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) affecting management of state school trust lands. House Bill 1022 would have required that DNR obtain the approval of the Legislature and the governor before making any commitment affecting more than 10,000 acres of state-owned forest land for five years or more. As the policy-making body of this state, and as the fiduciary trustee, the Legislature should have authority in setting policy for management of state lands.

Governor signs forest practices bill

On May 9, the governor signed into law HB 1985 which I sponsored to develop a series of pilot landscape-management plans. The measure will bring together state agencies, environmental groups, Indian tribes, and



Supporters joined Rep. Buck as Gov. Locke signed the forest practices bill, HB 1985.



Representative Jim Buck • 24th District

the timber industry to establish up to seven experimental pilot programs to complement similar efforts at the federal level.

The bill will set up a landscape-management process that allows the timber companies to do comprehensive planning on how they are going to harvest, as well as how they are going to manage for long-term habitat and wildlife considerations.

A fundamental element of this legislation is the need to build trust among the agencies, forest-land managers, and tribal organizations. The bill provides incentives for land owners and resource managers to work together toward a landscape-based approach to forest-practices regulation and away from the current site-by-site approach.

The seven pilot projects, which will be done concurrently with habitat conservation plans, will help establish long-term certainty for the timber industry as well as protecting fish and wildlife. Bringing diverse interests together on this proposal was one of the most satisfying accomplishments of the session.

Exemption for habitat/water improvements signed into law

I sponsored this bill (2SHB 1557) to provide private landowners with tax exemptions for improvements to their property which enhance wildlife habitat or improve water quality. Gov. Locke signed the bill May 9.

Many landowners are reluctant to participate in mitigation or restoration projects if the result of their investment of money and effort is higher property taxes. This bill provides a simple solution: Valuation will not increase when a property owner makes a voluntary improvement that benefits the environment. This bill is designed to encourage private efforts to help ensure the survival of wildlife and to protect the quantity and quality of water on or near their land.

Remember, I'm here to serve you as well as represent you

One of my responsibilities as your legislator is to help you when you have a problem with state agencies. While I can't always promise to get the answer you want out of government, I am always ready to lend a helping hand.

Jim Buck
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